THE NAMELESS ONE

A PLAY

ANNE CLEVELAND CHENEY

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THE NAMELESS ONE

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A Play in Three Acts

BY

ANNE CLEVELAND CHENEY

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No. 1.

TO THE MEMORY OF
A MOST LOVING AND FAITHFUL FATHER
THIS
DRAMA OF FATHERHOOD
IS INSCRIBED

CHARACTERS

EDWARD, LORD FAUKNER
LADY FAUKNER, *His Young Wife*
FATHER MICHAEL, *Chaplain to Lord Faukner*
LORD OF MISRULE, *Master of Yule Ceremonies in Lord Faukner's Household*
CONSTANCE, *Lady Faukner's Attendant*
MASTER LOCKET, *Keeper of an Inn*
MISTRESS LOCKET, *His Wife*
SNICK-UP, *a Lad of 16, Serving about the Inn Stables*
MIDGE, *a Young Maid Serving at the Inn*
HAL, GAFFA } *Servants at the Inn*
A WANDERING FRIAR
Minstrels, Pages, Footmen, a Falconer, a Turnkey, etc.

SCENE: *London and the southern part of Norfolk, England.*
TIME: *During the Sixteenth century.*

SCENES

ACT I. *An apartment in Lord Faukner's London house*

ACT II. SCENE I: *The courtyard of an inn on the southern coast of Norfolk, England*

SCENE II: *A garden-close at the inn*

ACT III. SCENE I: *A cell of an old prison, a mile from the inn*

SCENE II: *The inn courtyard*

SCENE III: *The prison cell again*

SCENE IV: *Once more, the courtyard*

Four months are supposed to elapse between Acts I and II; two weeks between Acts II and III.

In Act II, twelve hours are supposed to pass between the first and second scenes.

THE NAMELESS ONE

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ACT I

An apartment in LORD FAUKNER'S *London house. At rear a wide arch, hung with arras, glimpses a hall and massive staircase of dark wood, which mounts to a landing, dappled by color from a great rose window; to right of the landing, a gallery reaches away into shadow; the newel-posts are twined with laurel and surmounted by bronze candelabra. At right front of the apartment, a leaded casement opens inward, showing roofs and spires against a splendor of sunset sky. Opposite is a deep fireplace, above which are burnished sconces, and on either side, by the hearth, two tall candlesticks with thick Yule tapers; sconces also branch from the paneled walls, at left and right, up the apartment, between old portraits, wreathed in Christmas greens; beneath one of these near the*

casement, is a virginal. Heavily carved chairs, blazoned with the FAUKNER *arms, show against the wainscot. Near the fireplace, is a velvet-covered seat on which a lute is lying. A rich-hued carpet stretches over the stone floor. Fire and candles are unlighted.*

Sounds of pipe and hautboy and the voices of carol-singers float up from the street below.

CAROL-SINGERS

It was a star that shed its light,
Upon a manger poorly dight,
Three kings rode far to see,
Three kings rode far to see.
Now blessings be to that pure star,
And to those kings that journeyed far,
To Joseph and Mary,
To Joseph and Mary!

[*The singing ceases a moment. Two pages enter and stand on either side the arch in attendance on* FATHER MICHAEL, *who enters hurriedly, handing them his hat and cloak.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

Acquaint his lordship that I have returned
And beg important word with him *at once!*
[*Exeunt pages. Music sounds again and* FATHER MICHAEL *crosses to the casement where he leans, listening.*]

CAROL-SINGERS

But praises, praises evermore,
To Him that Virgin meekly bore,
To Christ's Nativity,
To Christ's Nativity!
For Mother, star and Babe—these three—
Noël, Noël, Noël!
[*Music ceases.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Taking money from a wallet at his side and throwing it into the street.*]
Noël, Noël!
[*Re-enter one of the pages coming down to* FATHER MICHAEL.]

PAGE

His lordship comes anon.

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Tossing him a coin.*]
A merry Yule!
[*The page catches the coin, grinning and bowing.*
Exit page. Shouts and laughter from below.]

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Calling to the revelers.*]
Ha, Master Mummer, but ye tumble well!
Bravo—a goodly leap—at it again!
[*He flings more money down; the voices die away;* FATHER MICHAEL *closes the casement and turns toward the arch as* LORD FAUKNER *enters and eagerly approaches the priest, speaking in low quick tones.*]

FAUKNER

Father, what news? O, for God's love, I pray
Thou hast learned something—*something* to assuage
This new, mad longing that doth gnaw my life!

FATHER MICHAEL

Calm thee, my son! I bring thee now clear
hope—
A very torch to light thee to thy goal
Of restitution—

FAUKNER

After all the years
Which locked my soul in dastard negligence—

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Laying a kindly, interrupting hand upon the other's shoulder.*]
Abhorrent now unto that newer self,
Imaged within thy lady's worshiping gaze.

FAUKNER

Father, thou sayest right! O, this new self—
This miracle of change, so mystic wrought,
By faith in her great steadfast eyes, grown
deep
With beatific hope of motherhood!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Crossing meditatively to the fireplace.*]
How matchless white are all the ways of God!
Not all calamities of earth or hell,
Drawn down athwart thy life for punishment,
Could curse thee into such a sure remorse,
As this transcendent love now blesseth thee,
And draws thee to thy knees at last, thy brow
Seeking the very dust of penitence!—

FAUKNER

But—of thy news, thy news!
[*He flings himself upon the seat near the fire.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

My wandering friar
Hath learned, beyond a doubt, the woman died,
Within some town to northward, on the Sea—

FAUKNER

Aye, where?

FATHER MICHAEL

He hath not learned its name, but proof
She left a child—

FAUKNER

The sex?

FATHER MICHAEL

Obscured by doubt;
For band o' friendly mountebanks harbored two—
A fair-haired boy and girl; both orphans, left
Upon their hands by chances of the road,
And wild hap-hazard of the gypsy life.
'Tis known the woman joined such strolling crew,
For safer journeying from town to town;
Knowing her death was near, she planned to leave
Her little one with kinsfolk in the north.

FAUKNER

The poor girl often spoke to me of such.

FATHER MICHAEL

But, ere she reached her goal, she slipped the road,
And flitted into shadow-land.

FAUKNER

Her child?

FATHER MICHAEL

Went onward with the troop, it is believed,
To those same kinsfolk. There is now a span
Of ten years reaching from that fateful day
To this bright Yule-tide eve; yet, even so,
Can we but learn the town wherein she died,
There is a thread by which my friar may lead
Our footsteps in the vagabond, aimless wake
Of that same strolling band—strangely empowered
To help one far as thou in high estate.

FAUKNER

[*Pacing restlessly.*]
O high estate, that used its lordly power
To waken motherhood, and then betray
To all the struggle and to all the shame!
[*He flings himself down with wretched brooding.*]
What pride of birth—to dower a weakling life
With doom of *bastard!*
[*The priest, who has moved to the casement, flings it wide.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

Come, O Penitent,
Behold how God hath shrived the world to-night!

[*The room is in deep shadow; through the open casement, a great star is seen glowing above a spire.*]

FAUKNER

[*Gazing out by the priest's side.*]
Ah, how this eve of His nativity
Fills all my consciousness with steady light,
As though a veil were rent before a shrine,
And I beheld the Mother visioned plain!

[*A woman's voice comes ringing sweet along the gallery.*]

LADY FAUKNER

[*From behind, singing.*]
It was a star that shed its light
Upon a manger poorly dight—

[*Pages swarm the hall with burning tapers, like fireflies in the dusk, and touch the great candelabra at foot of the stairs so that the landing is flooded with light.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

My Lady comes!

FAUKNER

All's bright at her approach!

[LADY FAUKNER *appears on the landing; singing and waving a branch of holly, she descends.*]

LADY FAUKNER

For Mother, star and Babe—these three—
Noël, Noël, Noël!

[FAUKNER *joins in the last three words of the refrain and goes up toward her.*

FATHER MICHAEL *closes the casement; the pages light the candles along the walls; but leave the great Yule candles unlighted.*]

LADY FAUKNER

Sweet Father Michael, how thy genial face
Doth add new joy to all our Christmas cheer!
Faith, Master Misrule will no longer dare
Such antic mummings and such madcap jests,
Since thou art come!

FATHER MICHAEL

Nay, let his mirth run high,
For tides of joy must now be at the flood.
[LORD *and* LADY FAUKNER *seat themselves. The priest stands before them by the fireside; the pages disappear.*]

LADY FAUKNER

How goes the world without this merry eve?

FATHER MICHAEL

Be-ribboned wassail bowls, from door to door,
The dancing wenches bear, and every street
Bursts into laughter, where the smutty-browed
And white-smocked mummers tumble and grimace:
The whole world pranks, but turnspit and the cook!

FAUKNER

I' faith, too busy they, for all the air
Tells of the savory tasks they now fulfill!

FATHER MICHAEL

And as I left my boat and mounted stair,
Methought th' embankment was a sylvan bower;
No gateway, balcony or rail but hung
With garlands o' the holly, laurel, yew,
And all the green that ever gladdened eye!

[*Music sounds; pages part the arras wide, disclosing a gay procession that winds down the stairway and across the hall.*]

LADY FAUKNER

[*Springing up and clapping her hands.*]
O 'tis the Yule-log now.

FAUKNER

[*Rising quickly.*]
Make way, make way!

FATHER MICHAEL

Hail to the Yule!

[*He and* Lord Faukner *roll the divan back from the fireplace, and across the casement.*

Father Michael *hands her Ladyship to it.*]

My Lady sits enthroned.

[LORD FAUKNER *and the priest stand near her at either end.*

Enter LORD OF MISRULE—*a silken, sleek harlequin, tripping fantastically and waving a small torch in his left hand. Following is a band of gorgeously attired pages, bearing the Yule-log engarlanded; next minstrels, blowing lustily on pipes, hautboys, etc.; last enters a group of young women with garlands and led by* CONSTANCE, *who carries a delicate wreath studded with scarlet berries.*

The LORD OF MISRULE *approaches* LORD *and* LADY FAUKNER, *capering and bowing low. Two pages stand before the hearth, holding their precious burden; other pages group themselves at left; the minstrels at right; the maids stand at center, except* CONSTANCE, *who dances down to* LADY FAUKNER *and places the Christmas wreath on her head.*]

ALL

[*Shouting as she does so.*]

Noël!

[*Music ceases.*]

MISRULE

By your leave, the Yule we light—
[*To musicians.*]
(While music, soft, attunes to sacred rite!)
Pan and the dryads wreathed by mystic art,
[*Points to the log.*]
With sorcerous rosemary to witch the heart,
With mistletoe clipt from the sacred oak,
Holly his nymphs with bleeding fingers broke,
And lo, each berry glows, a ruddy drop,
Their eager hands left fall and would not stop.
[*To pages, who move in unison with his waving torch.*]
Heave one, heave two, heave three!
[*The log falls into place and the pages step away to either end of the hearth.*]

ALL

Noël, Noël!

MISRULE

This torch, here burning, is a precious brand
From yester-Yule—for, prithee, understand,
The fresh log must be lighted from the old;
'Tis only so shall blessings manifold

Wait on the Lord and Lady of this hall,
And scatter bounty to the lowliest thrall!
[*He signals the musicians, who play softly as he bends to light the log. The flames leap up.*]
Who throweth twigs upon the Christmas blaze,
Shall see strange omens and in magic ways,
May portent of the past and future read,
And signs it shall behoove them close to heed.
And now Yule candles all must lighted be,
And garlanded with bay and rosemary!
[*He beckons the maids; two and two, they circle forward in time to livelier music, casting each a wreath over the great Yule candles at either end of the fireplace. As the last wreath falls and the last two maids dance back to place,* MISRULE *lights the candles. Then* LADY FAUKNER *rises and, taking some gold pieces from a silken bag at her side, flings them toward each group.*]

LADY FAUKNER

In memory o' the myrrh—the gold—the frankincense—
I give ye merrie Christmasse!

[*She steps back as they duck for the gold with laughter and shouts.*]

ALL

Noël, Noël!

MISRULE

[*Capering forward to* LORD *and* LADY FAUKNER.]

And now, my gentles, we must all away,
With thanks, like little dogs that bound and play,
About our heels and well-nigh trip us up;
And after that my Lord and Lady sup,
A mask we shall present to tickle such
As love high humor with a racy touch.

[*At the beginning of the last speech, the musicians have filed out; then the maids and men; lastly,* MISRULE *leads* CONSTANCE *by the hand and goes capering and dancing away with her, kissing her under the mistletoe as they pass through the arch.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

I go now to fulfill your bounteous wish,
Toward all beneath this roof.

FAUKNER

Aye, Father, swell
The lusty tide of all the Yule's high feast,
With wishes that do have a *golden* ring!

LADY FAUKNER

Aye, and, dear Father Michael, haste ye back
With feet that have quicksilver for their soles,
To join our sober revelry by the hearth!

[*The priest bows low and leaves.* LADY FAUKNER *crosses to the fire and spreads her hands gleefully before it.*]

LADY FAUKNER

A merry blaze, forsooth!

[LORD FAUKNER *draws the couch nearer to it.*]

FAUKNER

Come, bask in it here!

[*They seat themselves. Taking up the lute beside her, she softly thrums, bending toward the fire.*]

LADY FAUKNER

A little tune for sparks to dance by, so—
With tiny, glittering shoon—Ha, see them frisk,
And leap along the dark! A frolic wench
Is chased into the shadow by a swain,
Who doth pursue, his little heart on fire;
With what a burning ardor doth he buss
Her ruddy cheek! They whirl and whirl away!
[*Laying the lute aside and leaning her head against his shoulder.*]
Nay, fires are for a dream—not for the dance!
[*Both are silent awhile, gazing into the flames.*]

FAUKNER

There is no sight nor sound this holy eve,
No merest wonted shred of circumstance,
But thrills with deeper meaning or doth take
A fair, new outline, as fresh fallen snow
Will drape the wayside's commonest heap or hut,
With towering splendor of a vision's grace;
And O, my Flower o' Life, if this be true,
For all the humblesse of accustomed show,

With what transcendent ecstasy this hour
Must charge the hope that nestles near thy heart,
And rests upon my own! Nativity—
'Tis caroled, rung, emblazoned round the earth;
E'en simple cattle kneel within their stalls,
The bees hum cheerly in their slumberous hives,
The sheep move to unheard processional,
With mystic sense of worship all around!
And we two awe-struck souls draw near, O near,
Unto that cradle of the whole wide world,
With worship crowning that of other years,
Led by the star that rises over us!

LADY FAUKNER

So, dear My Lord, I feel but cannot say!
I turn my rapt face upward to the light,
And follow—seeking, worshiping with my gift—
Mother of God—ah, she will understand!

FAUKNER

I do believe no lily of the stalk
Cecilia held within her glistering hand,

Ere breathed so sweet, so fulgent white as thou!

LADY FAUKNER

And O I do believe no shining knight
That ever jousted o'er the sunlit plain,
Bore lance more bravely true—

FAUKNER

[*Springs to his feet.*]
Nay, by God's love!
Knighthood? To spare the weak, guard womanhood,
Play frank and fair, fight with all fealty,
And die all deaths ere trust it shall betray!
[*He moves to the casement and flings it open.*]

LADY FAUKNER

Aye, only this is knightly, Love, and thou?
When didst thou strike the frail, or womanhood?
When didst thou falter back from fealty?
Is there a death would cow thee from a trust?
[*She rises, goes to him and takes his arm tenderly.*]

O now, what solemn, far-fetched trick o' thought
Doth trouble thee? A somewhat left undone
Ere old Nurse Life had loosed thy swaddling bands?
Whisk, through the casement all such goblins go!
[*She slams to the casement and draws him merrily back to the fire.*]
Hast thou forgotten Motley Misrule's word?
The Yule-log lighted with a last year's brand
Will scare the evil spirits all away,
And draw around our hearth a friendly troop
O' forces favorable to our needs.
[*She seats herself beside him again, her head on his shoulder.*]

FAUKNER

Ah, light-of-heart, thou canst not understand
How, deep within, some souls, there lies a fault
Must penance pay and fast and tell its beads,
Ere all be shriven within their consciences.

LADY FAUKNER

Nay, I do understand—'tis so with all—
Why, even I, thou callest wonder-white—

FAUKNER

[*Recovering himself.*]

O *thou*—I pray thee, spare me such dark tale
Of dire misdeed! Of stitches wrongly set
In thy tapestry, and unrepaired. Ah, me!
Crime o' the roses thou didst wantonly kill,
By turning all the sunshine of thy face,
Too long away; the beads that ne'er were told,
For following where the blossoms beckoned thee,
With rosy fingers, through the chapel grille!

[*Re-enter* FATHER MICHAEL.]

Nay, here is fit confessor now—

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Approaching.*]

My Lord?

FAUKNER

[*Rising and leaning by the fireplace.*]

Disburthen to the Reverend Father all
Thy heinous guilt!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*With mock solemnity and taking his place at the other end of the fire.*]

Daughter, confess, confess!

LADY FAUKNER

Faith and I will then, for 'tis nothing less
Than sacrilege, that's unrepented of—
My mother called it so, but in my heart,
I hold it was no sin. 'Tis now ten years,
This Christmas Eve, still unconvinced am I—

FAUKNER

[*Playfully.*]
So, so! unruly daughter of the Church,
Rebellious, likewise, to a parent's law—
Father, can such as these make faithful wife?

FATHER MICHAEL

Peace, peace, my son, for we would hear and judge.

LADY FAUKNER

Sooth, and I was no more than just a child.
Left to my Yule-tide fancies in the storm,
Of that fierce night, when all th' accustomed cheer
Was palled by plague and tempest; through the wind,
I heard the steady booming o' the waves,

Out in the darkness on the cliff; I said—
Soft to myself, for loneliness and fear—
It is the tramp, tramp, tramp of horses' feet,
The Three Kings ride this way to seek the Child!
I pushed the casement for a little space;
The snow swirled by—a long, white, awful trail;
I said, *It is the light of that high Star,*
That leads them ever onward through the night!
But where, methought, are Mother and the Babe?
Then stranger voices sounded, from below;
I crept a-down the stair—Mary most pure!
There, at the foot, full in the torches' flare,
A woman stood—her white, unearthly face
Bending above a child upon her arm;
Its form was hid in folds of her long cloak,
But, O, its wondering eyes and shining brow
Gleamed out above the black, aye, straight at me!
I ran along the hall, my mother's skirt
I plucked at whispering, "Look, the Child, the Child,
Within the Virgin's arms!"—Father, to me,
It was the very truth. My mother gazed,

In horror, from my lifted, pointing hand,
To where the woman stood;—sign o' the Cross
She made, and weary penance was I set,
To shrive me of my Yule-tide dreaming.

FAUKNER

Nay,
Thou wert thyself a child!

FATHER MICHAEL

Ten years ago
Thou saidst?

LADY FAUKNER

So long ago, dear Father, yet
Each Christmas Eve it all comes back to me—
Her wasted face, her praying, praying eyes—
At dawn she died!

FATHER MICHAEL

Not there—within thy home?

LADY FAUKNER

No beggar could be turned from door at Yule,
Nor in such blasting storm, and so the crew
Of strolling mountebanks—

FAUKNER

[*Starting violently.*]
Mountebanks?

LADY FAUKNER

[*Starting, too, and imitating him.*]
Mountebanks, aye!
Such panther-pounce would startle bravest heart!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Smoothly.*]
My Lord and I both started; by strange chance,
I had but now been telling him a tale—
Fantastic happening to wandering friar—
In which some strolling players bore a part.
Thou spok'st but now of waves upon the cliff—
And so, thy childhood's home was by the sea,
Mid ballads o' the sail and briny air?

LADY FAUKNER

At Norfolk.

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Looking meaningly at* Lord Faukner.]
Then *at Norfolk 'twas she died,*

Ten years ago to-night—or didst thou dream,
The woman died?—thou little dreamer!
[FAUKNER *leans forward with fixed intentness.*]

LADY FAUKNER

Nay,
All the sad was true! They buried her
In a lonely, little grave upon the cliff.
They always hushed me when I spoke of her,
And called her something and the poor child, too,
I could not understand except 'twas shame
To talk of such.

FAUKNER

The child—a boy or girl?
What age was it?—no babe upon her breast?

LADY FAUKNER

Nay, not a babe—it had long, auburn hair—
Like to Your Lordship's, glinted by the light.

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Quickly.*]
A boy, perchance?

LADY FAUKNER

I never saw the child
After those moments, when it looked at me,
So strange and deep from out her hanging cloak;
The strollers went their mumming, gypsying way—
So there's an end to all my Christmas tale!
[*She rises and approaches* LORD FAUKNER, *playfully shaking a finger at him.*]
And now, My Lord, it is thy turn—confess!
What drove thee to the casement? Aye, what wrong
Hast thou to match my tale? Hear, Father, hear!
[*Enter* CONSTANCE, *approaching the priest.*]

CONSTANCE

A friar below awaits Your Reverence,
And begs a word.

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Starting slightly and glancing at* FAUKNER.]
And if it please My Lord
To bear me company and speak with him,

It may be matters of thy tenantry
He comes to tell, and thou, perchance, would hear.

FAUKNER

[*Kissing his lady's hand.*]
A moment, Love, and I return.

LADY FAUKNER

Aye, so!
For soon we sup—and then—Ah, then, the mask!

[*Exeunt* LORD FAUKNER *and the priest;* FAUKNER *bending his head intently as* FATHER MICHAEL *talks in a low tone.* LADY FAUKNER *crosses to the virginal and plays a quaint little air.*]

CONSTANCE

[*Following.*]
Ah, dear My Lady, never such a mask
Was given—e'en at the Court—so Misrule saith!
A forest all of thickly flowering trees,
Birds in the branches, caroling clear and loud;
And from each tree a hamadryad steps,

Veiled in a mist o' green and silvery gauze,
Floating like—

LADY FAUKNER

[*Rising and laying one hand over* CONSTANCE'S *mouth.*]
Nay, I will not have thee tell!
It shall burst o'er me in a glorious tide
O' sheer surprise—that I may know the thrill
Beats in a lightning tattoo down the spine,
And starteth us a-goose-flesh with delight!

CONSTANCE

I know, I know, a sort of pain—

LADY FAUKNER

[*Coming down, her arm about* CONSTANCE.]
But more
A piercing pleasure!

CONSTANCE

Aye, just so, just so!

LADY FAUKNER

Same piercing pleasure—ah, thou naughty Con!

Thou hadst, but now, beneath the mistletoe,
When Master Misrule—

CONSTANCE

Nay, now, 'tis not so!
'Twas Agatha he caught!

LADY FAUKNER

Then, by my faith,
She wore thy purfled, cherry petticoat,
And hath as trim a waist for clasping—Aye,
And laughs as clear!—methought now,—only thou
Couldst make of laughter such a silver bell!

CONSTANCE

[*Kissing her hand.*]
My Lady, e'en at gibing thou art kind!

LADY FAUKNER

O Con, I tell thee what we now will do!—
Throw me some twigs o' laurel on the fire,
And read me omens there! Thy Misrule saith,
A wondrous power is thine, like any witch,
To interpret omens.

CONSTANCE

[*Going to the hearth while* LADY FAUKNER *follows and seats herself with girlish eagerness.*]

Aye, in very truth!
Laurel o' Yule-tide, thrown upon the flames—

[*She gathers laurel from among the candlesticks into her lifted skirt and kneeling before the fire, throws on some sprigs, murmuring a sort of incantation:*]

Burn, laurel, burn!
Turn, Sibyl, turn!
For portent and a sign,
Deep in the fire now shine—

[*She breaks off suddenly, giving a startled look, over her shoulder, at* LADY FAUKNER.]

LADY FAUKNER

What seest thou, Con?

CONSTANCE

Nay, nothing! Nothing yet!

LADY FAUKNER

Thou *lookst* as thou hadst seen the very devil!

[CONSTANCE *gazes silently, steadfastly at the fire; then raises her hands to her face, as though to shut out something.*]

In name of all the goblin host now, Con,
What *is* it?

CONSTANCE

Nay, it is no thing at all!
The laurel hath no power, or I forget—
Or I have lost—

LADY FAUKNER

Certes, a pretty play—
At first we stare—O wild, as we had seen
The reddest imp in hell; then, like the sphinx,
So deep, mysterious, we gaze and gaze,
Then, clap our hands to eyes—yet 'tis no thing,
No thing at all! but we have lost our art,
Or laurel turns a lie—or Heaven knows what!

[*Re-enter* LORD FAUKNER, *coming down, followed by the priest.*]

FAUKNER

And now to supper all—the boar's head waits!

LADY FAUKNER

[*Rising.*]
Nay, not one step we stir till Constance here,
Doth clear the mystery about this hearth!

FAUKNER

[*Looking toward the priest.*]
A mystery?

FATHER MICHAEL

Here?

CONSTANCE

[*Rising from her knees.*]
O sirs, my Lady dear
Is angered that I cannot read the flames!
'Tis long time since old Mother Moll set forth
How one might see strange omens in the log—

FAUKNER

[*Lightly.*]
Some frolic of My Lady!

FATHER MICHAEL

Witches' tale!

[*As* LADY FAUKNER *and* CONSTANCE *move up away from the fire, talking, arm in arm,* LORD FAUKNER *and the priest speak together, near the casement.*]

Thou seest it was the very long-sought clue
May lead thee to the child! An untoward chance,
The friar should hap this very night to come
And hear the tale from thee, well nigh as soon
As it had fallen from thy Lady's lips!

FAUKNER

This night is fraught with strangeness and with fate!
I feel my soul moved on through all the cheer,
The guiding hope and glory of this tide,
To seek that other child—obscure, alone,
Abandoned, drifting, drifting, God knows where,
Or to what fate!

LADY FAUKNER

[*Turning.*]

O prithee, come, My Lord!

The boar's head must be grinning wide this while,
To give us welcome!

FAUKNER

[*Going up.*]
Love, I come, I come!

[*Pages part the arras, music sounds, and* LORD FAUKNER *leads his lady across the hall and up the stairway. As they disappear,* CONSTANCE *approaches the priest earnestly.*]

CONSTANCE

Father, I read the flame—the power was mine!
But—Oh, I would not shock my Lady's ear,
Or grieve her tender, noble heart with such!—
'Twas *shame* I read there! Oh, some direful fate,
To first-born of this house! and she with hope—

[*She weeps.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

Nay, nay, my child! what trumpery is this,
Of laurel twigs, Yule omens and the like?

That arch buffoon, young Misrule—faith, 'tis
he
Hath turned thy pretty head!

CONSTANCE

'Twas Mother Moll.
She told me when a house hath hope of heir,
And faggots fall—O Father, as to shape—
[*Covering her eyes.*]
Nay, I'll not name the thing!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Taking down her hands.*]
Beshrew me now,
But I would think on merry mask instead!
'Tis whispered Misrule will appear in guise
The very grandest; wilt thou greet him then,
With blubbered face and eyes all woe-begone?
[CONSTANCE *starts and dries her eyes and smooths her hair; the priest leads her a few steps up toward the arch.*]
Yule is for feasting—youth, for merry hearts
And frisking heels!
[*Exit* CONSTANCE. *The priest stands musing a moment.*]
The night grows big with fate!

[*He crosses to the hearth and gazes down into the fire.*]

What of that first-born?—drifting—God knows where!

Curtain

ACT II

Scene I

The courtyard of an inn at Norfolk; at left, stands the inn, its low, broad doors open, a settle on one side, and above a huge gargoyle protruding in the shape of a griffin bearing a swing sign in its mouth; beyond the gargoyle a small balcony runs along under the windows; at right, a high wall and nearer the center a linden tree with circular bench beneath; at rear, the high wall and iron gates, through which pines may be seen and stretch of sea beyond; by the gates, outside, is an elder tree; at rear left, is an alley between the inn and the wall, leading off in direction of the stables.

It is afternoon of the last day in April, four months having elapsed since the first act

Master Locket *is dozing on the settle. There is a rumble of wheels and a horn sounds clear;* Locket *starts up, rubbing his eyes;*

MISTRESS LOCKET *emerges from the inn, leaning on her staff and followed by* MIDGE.

LOCKET

[*Shouting.*]

Snick-up, Snick-up!—curse ye and *go hang!*
The wag that dubbed ye knew ye for a knave!
[*He goes toward the gates grumbling.*]
Never in sight when there's a need o' ye—
A crooked, scurvy good-for-nowt!

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Poking* MIDGE *with her staff.*]

Haste, haste,
And find ye Snick-up and the other louts,
Here's gentry at the gates!
[*She hobbles on half way after* LOCKET. *A voice calls softly:*]

SNICK-UP

[*From above.*]

Hist, Midge! Hi, Midge!
[*Looking up,* MIDGE *discovers* SNICK-UP, *grimacing, astride the gargoyle. Terrified, she wrings her hands, waves him back*

and points toward the LOCKETS. SNICK-UP *darts under cover of the griffin and* MIDGE *runs round the house, calling:*]

MIDGE

Snick-up! Gaffa! Hal! Ho, Gaffa! Hal!

LOCKET

[*Backing and bowing before* LORD *and* LADY FAUKNER *and* CONSTANCE, *who come forward from the coach, drawn up beyond the gates.*]

And 't please your worships, enter this poor inn!

[*Fiercely to* GAFFA *and* HAL, *who come running toward the gates:*]

Sirrah, go to't ye laggards and make haste!

[*Re-enter* MIDGE, *following* MISTRESS LOCKET, *who is curtseying before* LADY FAUKNER *and* CONSTANCE, *as they approach the inn, while* LORD FAUKNER *is directing* LOCKET *and the servants by the gates.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

God dig ye den, my ladies! *Dig* ye—

[*Thrusting her staff at* MIDGE *to curtsey.*]

Den!

[*Both bob up and down before* LADY FAUKNER.]

LADY FAUKNER

Ah, but this heat—I stifle with the heat!

CONSTANCE

Dear Lady, let me loose thy cloak—now, so—
Is it not better?

[*As* CONSTANCE *draws the cloak from My Lady's shoulders and throws it over her own arm, a jeweled aglet falls unseen. She glances about;* SNICK-UP *is peering down at them.*]

Dropped you anything?

[MIDGE *and* MISTRESS LOCKET *look vaguely about their feet.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

What hath My Lady lost?

CONSTANCE

Nay, nay, 'tis naught!
Let us within—My Lady is clean fagged.

LADY FAUKNER

Good Mistress, show us where to lay our heads.
'Tis all we ask, and be it hard or soft!

MISTRESS LOCKET

O, please, Your Ladyship, 'tis soft enow!

[*The women enter the inn followed by* MIDGE, *who glances up at* SNICK-UP. *He peers over and puffs his cheeks at her, as she darts into the house. Servants come forward with luggage and enter the inn.* LOCKET *follows, obsequious, before* LORD FAUKNER.]

LOCKET

An 't please My Lord, this way, this way!

[*A sound of clear, whistling bird-notes comes from the branches.* LOCKET *calls in its direction:*]

Snick-up!
Jack o' the Hump, and so—a pretty trick,
Thou'lt smart for when the hour hath struck for knaves!

FAUKNER

[*Listening.*]

What is it can fling such melody abroad?

LOCKET

What is 't? What is 't? Your Lordship, that, I trow,
None but the devil can tell;—a crooked ape,
With note o' bird; God's life an' he can throw
That note from any point he will, yet hang,
Agrin with impish mirth, a mile away
From where good Christians go to seek the sound.

[SNICK-UP *grins down at him and puts thumb to nose. Again the whistle trills and his lordship listens.*]

FAUKNER

N'er heard I sweeter note!

LOCKET

From Jackanape's pipe!
A dreaming, useless, misbegotten clout,
Works when he will and when he will not, quits
And peeks and perches, whistling here and there—
God knows if he be near or leagues away!
Mocking the birds in voice, the beast in—

FAUKNER

[*Turning impatiently.*]

Hold!

What is all this to me? Let us within!

[*They pass through the inn door.* SNICK-UP *swings down from the gargoyle and steps slyly, peering along the ground.*]

SNICK-UP

I saw thee flash and glance away, then *snuff!*
Thy little light went out between the flags—
Just here—ah, *here!*

[*Stooping, he picks up the aglet and holds it to the light.*]

Fie, Midge, thou art a mole!

[*Imitating derisively.*]

What hath My Lady lost? Nay, nay, 'tis naught!
Nay, nay, 'tis something, something dazzling fine—

[*He pauses, listening. Voices are heard; he slips the aglet into his jerkin and runs off around the house as* CONSTANCE *enters, followed by* MISTRESS LOCKET.]

CONSTANCE

[*Breathing long and gazing about.*]
How fragrant all the air from sea and pines!
I pray it bring My Lady deep repose!
[*She crosses to the seat under the linden,*
MISTRESS LOCKET *following.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

O that it will, sweet Mistress, that it will!
'Tis like a draught o' rosemary, it so clears
The weary head and gladdens all the heart;
Thy Lady's time is near?

CONSTANCE

Midsummer days
Will see a wee, fresh bud on mother-stalk,
In My Lady's garden, and if all go well.

MISTRESS LOCKET

God grant, God grant!

CONSTANCE

'Twas of a sudden whim,
She minded to come northward by the sea,
And there to lay her precious burden down,

Within those halls where her small, wandering feet
Pattered their way from babyhood to youth.
She hath not been there since her mother died;
But well thou knowst how fixed such fancies be;—
When ladies in her plight will so or so,
Why, so 't must be, or things go all awry!

MISTRESS LOCKET

O aye, beshrew me! ere my first was born,
I took a mind to go to county fair—
Go and I did! God sonties, all the night
Was fair enow for me! and what to pay?
My boy turned stroller—aye, away he ran,
And tumbled, jigged and mummed out all his days,
Now here, now there; a thriftless ne'er-do-well,
His father called him—fathers so can turn—
But we that bear 'em never can let go;
'Tis only Death can make us lose our grip!
And then we turn the name that's been a prayer,
Into a blessing—Mother o' God, that's all—
Blessing and prayer and love—mayhap, our life,
Is what we give, come saints or Judases!

[*She falls to weeping gently, wiping her eyes with a corner of her kerchief.* CONSTANCE *strokes the old hand lying on the staff.*]

CONSTANCE

Nay, 'tis the strollers twist our sorry world
Into a happy grimace of sheer fun,
We must have, Dame, to keep us young and kind!

MISTRESS LOCKET

His gentle eye, his sharp and merry quips—
The dogs would turn from meat to lick his hands!

CONSTANCE

And he is dead, good Mistress, thy sweet son?

MISTRESS LOCKET

O, aye, an' just one year, come Whitsuntide!

CONSTANCE

[*Soothingly.*]
Good dame, good mother!

MISTRESS LOCKET

O his heart was soft!
Why e'en that hunchback limb o' mischief here,
That "Snick-up," as they call him, out o' scorn,
My son was good to! Aye, for nine long years,
The two strolled on by river and by road,
But far enow from here, ye may be sure,—
My man was angered so to have a son
Turn vagabond, that might 'a' kept an inn.

CONSTANCE

Some for the roving life—'twas ever so!

MISTRESS LOCKET

But when he thought to die, for sight o' me,
He came back here and in these very arms,
Took up his rest—no strolling any more,
But long, long rest in his grave upon the cliff.

CONSTANCE

And now his father gibes no more, I warrant!

MISTRESS LOCKET

No more at him; he hath another butt—
'Tis Snick-up now; a hump upon the back,
Spreads right fair target for a choleric shaft,
And makes fine shoulders for to hang the cloak
Of all the scorn he used to dole the son.

CONSTANCE

[*Patting her shoulder coaxingly.*]
And yet, he keeps him here, remember that,
Good Dame! 'Tis memory of his dear, lost son,
Maketh your choleric man to hold the waif
And house and foster him—is it not so?

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*With cackling derision.*]
O memory, O dear, O *foster* aught!
Locket, the pounce-on-penny, grip-o'-gold!
O Lord, I never thought to laugh so long,
Since my lumbago nipped me i' the back!
'Tis *foster* Snick-up is 't? Aye, to work
The soles from off the feet he will not shoe,
The skin from off the palms he ne'er let feel

A touch o' one brass farthing since he came;—
Foster, ecod! *For memory*—O my back!

[*She catches her back and breath suddenly. Both women start at sound of hoofs as* FATHER MICHAEL *rides into the courtyard and* SNICK-UP *comes running toward the gates from around the corner of the inn, an old hat, with a plume made of turkey feathers, tucked under one arm.*]

CONSTANCE

[*Rising eagerly.*]

'Tis Father Michael!

[*As the priest dismounts hurriedly and turns from the horse,* SNICK-UP, *instead of leading the horse, mounts, puts on the broad, plumed hat and rides proudly and slowly around and towards the stables. The priest turns suddenly to call an order after him, and, seeing the quaint figure, watches with a puzzled, pitying smile.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Curtseying.*]

He plays at being knight—his favorite game,
When he can steal a mount, Your Reverence!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Calling after* SNICK-UP.]
Another horse, in haste—now, mark ye well!
[*To* CONSTANCE, *who makes obeisance.*]
My blessing, daughter! Seek His Lordship out,
My time is brief—I must have word at once!

CONSTANCE

I fly, good Father!
[*She goes hastily into the house.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

And I limp, forsooth,
To nip that dream o' knighthood in the bud!
[*She hobbles laboriously after* SNICK-UP.]
Gentry enow to-day—all's jump and jig!
[*The priest paces thoughtfully with troubled brow. He is soon interrupted, however, by* CONSTANCE, *who has hastened back.*]

CONSTANCE

His Lordship comes anon!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Starting.*]
Thy diligence
I shall reward, my child; now look ye here!
[*He takes a small packet from his cloak.*]
Thy Misrule begged me bear it with his love—
He soon will follow it.

CONSTANCE

[*Grasping it with blushing eagerness.*]
Father, thou art
Our very truest friend.
[*She breaks off and turns hurriedly toward the inn.*]
His Lordship comes!
[LORD FAUKNER *comes forward as* CONSTANCE *vanishes through the door.*]

FAUKNER

'Tis unexpected, Father! No bad news?

FATHER MICHAEL

Both grave and good! As we had planned, I pushed
On to My Lady's home to wait thee there;

But tidings overtook me—state affairs,
Meaning, perchance, the life or death of some;
Thou know'st how hard it fares, these troublous times,
With those o' the faith—

FAUKNER

O Father, hard indeed!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Speaking low and hurriedly.*]

With hottest speed, I must retrace my steps—
'Tis life or death, I say again, to some!
But word or two with thee: My friar hath found
The child doth live—is in this neighborhood—

FAUKNER

[*With a passionate gesture.*]

Nay, Father, nay! I hope not any more—
At Yule-tide thou hadst hope and still the months
Have dragged themselves away, and every clue
Turned futile to thy plodding, slow-foot friar.

FATHER MICHAEL

Truth he was baffled and good reason for 't!
'Tis learned the strollers, out o' pity, kept
Their charge—since kinsfolk turned it off in scorn—

FAUKNER

[*Bitterly, pacing to and fro.*]
Scorn, ever scorn, its only heritage!

FATHER MICHAEL

And then, for some strange reason, off they go—
Though natives o' this shire—and wander on,
For years, in distant parts; but by strange hap,
My *slow-foot plodder,* as thy bitterness gibes,
Hath learned their leader, wellnigh dead with want,
Strayed back to some town near us in the north,
And brought the lad—

FAUKNER

[*Pausing with a violent start near the inn door.*]
A *lad*—thou sayest, *lad?*

FATHER MICHAEL

The stroller died and left him at some town
Near to My Lady's home, along the cliffs;
And in short space he shall be found—or dead,
Or living—this we cannot tell thee yet.
I grieve to tear away so short, my son,
But matters o' the Church command me to it,
With utmost, urgent haste; meantime, my friar
Is seeking—Courage, all is narrowing in.

[SNICK-UP *enters, unnoticed, leading a horse.*]

FAUKNER

[*Passing one hand over his brow in dazed fashion.*]
The first-born and a lad and very near!

SNICK-UP

He is here, an't please you, gentles!

[*Both men start and, looking around, see that* SNICK-UP *has brought the horse.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

[*To* LORD FAUKNER.]
Fare thee well!

[*With a gesture,* FAUKNER *goes in at the door as* LOCKET *comes hurriedly around the corner of the inn.*]

LOCKET

[*Moving toward the horse.*]
Have ye been served, My Lord and Reverend Sir?
[*He fumbles about the saddle, as the priest moves to mount.*]
Ha! looseness o' the girth!
[*Turning on* SNICK-UP.]
Fine hostler thou!
Hanging around for naught but stirrup-fee!
[*As the priest mounts.*]
Thou bastard!
[*The priest turns sharply in his saddle, with startled horror.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

Bastard, *thou?*
[*Recovering himself, and with a gesture as of dismissing some hateful thing:*]
Perish the thought!

[*He rides hastily through the gates, tossing a coin and calling back:*]

For the lad!

[LOCKET *grovels greedily for it, but* SNICK-UP *is too quick and snatches the coin, dropping it into his pocket. At the same time, he reaches forward and clutches the kneeling* LOCKET *by the neck of his coat and shakes him violently.*]

SNICK-UP

[*Through ground teeth.*]

That from the bastard—*so* and *so!*

[*He flings him off and* LOCKET *being too breathless to speak, the boy continues in fury.*]

Call me all things thou wilt—*hump-shouldered ape,*

Snick-up, forsooth, a *fiend o' the lowest hell*—

I shrug my hump at ye and go my way—

'Tis all to me, to me, who care not that!

[*Snapping his fingers in* LOCKET'S *lifted face.*]

But, when ye sneer the one accursed word,

Thou touchest her that bore me and was damned

To wander down the same dark road o' shame—
No mercy for a mile-stone—no, not one—
Save only that which thine own son bestowed!

[LOCKET *has risen to his feet, slowly and with violent trembling. He speaks cringingly.*]

LOCKET

Maynap I went too far to touch thy shame;
But I was angered at thy careless ways,
Endangering gentry's lives—

SNICK-UP

The girth was right—
It was the stirrup-fee thou fingered for!

LOCKET

Aye, and the stirrup-fee should go to him
That gives thee meat and drink, clothes to thy back.

[SNICK-UP *turns his tattered shoes and jerkin up in comic derision.*]

Good Snick-up, hear ye reason now! God wot,
It can go hard with thee for this, an I so will

To blab on't—thou, a prentice, to assault
Thy lawful master! but ye give me up
The coin, was flung thee by mistake—why, then,
All's as before! Come, Snick-up, be ye wise!
[*He holds out his hand for the money.* SNICK-UP *throws it at him and he stoops for it with the look of a miser's lust.*]

SNICK-UP

[*Watching in scorn.*]
Have it and welcome—'tis no good to me!
Where I live, it can buy no single thing,
For all is priceless.

LOCKET

[*Peering at the other suspiciously.*]
Thank ye, Snick-up, thanks!
[*He moves toward the inn muttering and casting furtive looks at* SNICK-UP, *who has flung himself on the bench under the linden.*]
'Tis mad he is—Ecod, no use for gold!
Where thinks he that he lives? And with that gift,
Straight from Beelzebub, to make birds sing,

And he a mile away; aye, dangerous, too,
With devil's temper, and the devil's grip!
[*He fingers his neck reminiscently and shakes his head with menace toward* SNICK-UP, *who is lounging against the tree, whistling very softly.*]
He and his witches' pipe must pack from here,
Or mischief will be in the place, that's sure!
[*He goes through the inn door as* MIDGE *comes with an air of eager mystery around the corner of the house, something hidden under her apron.*]

MIDGE

[*Approaching* SNICK-UP.]
Snick-up, here's a jack o' good, brown ale,
I snatched when Cook turned from her meal, to cuff
The turnspit, for he let the capons burn—
Ow, Ow, she cuffed him
[*Imitating the cook.*]
and she'll lose her ale!
[*She hands him the mug and sits beside him.*]

SNICK-UP

Her warty, red nose will no redder grow,
Over the brink o' this!
[*He quaffs it at a draught and sets the mug down between them.*]
Good little Midge!
Are all at supper now?

MIDGE

Aye, everyone!

SNICK-UP

Then I will tell a secret an' thou swear—
Crossing thy heart, thou ne'er wilt breathe one word?

MIDGE

Crossing my heart a million times, I swear!

SNICK-UP

A broken vow is damned, Midge, thou dost know?

MIDGE

[*Nodding solemnly.*]
I know!

SNICK-UP

And should they drag thee to the stake,
Thou wilt not speak one single, *littlest* word?

MIDGE

Nay, an' they put me in a cage with rats,
I'd hold my mouth and say I had gone dumb!

SNICK-UP

[*Drawing the aglet from his breast and dangling it before her astonished eyes.*]
What thinkest thou o' that?

MIDGE

[*In awed, hushed tone.*]
Snick-up, a *star!*

SNICK-UP

A fallen star—I found it in the flags—
Just here—
[*He moves off and points with his toe to the very spot.*]
It is a jeweled aglet—see—
[*He goes toward her and holds it once more before her eyes.*]

My Lady dropped when she was at the door;
None saw but me, up on the griffin there,
Grinning at Grip-the-purse, to hear him bawl,
And swear and I just over his dull pate!

MIDGE

He'll kill thee some day an thou tempt him so!

SNICK-UP

Nay, I've no purse to seize on and I work!
[*He fingers the aglet, holding it this way and that; then glancing about in fear lest some one may be overlooking from the inn, he thrusts the jewel into his jerkin. Bending over* MIDGE *with one knee on the bench, he speaks with low, quick eagerness.*]
Listen, now, Midge! I heard Dame Locket say,
The Lady must stay quiet here and rest
Another day, ere she may venture on,
To last stage o' the journey; our good dame
Said likewise that My Lady had a mind
To spend the morning in our garden-close,

Where she may smell the flowers, whiff o' the sea,
And dream of her near home. Now, 'tis my plan,
When she is left a moment by herself,
To steal in softly to her and to kneel,
[*With an odd grace, he acts out his plan.*]
Just as a knight would and to hold her out
This rare, lost jewel, saying—*Lady dear,*
Thine aglet 'tis mine honor to restore!
She, being gently born, will welcome me—
For that I do her service—smile on me,
And, mayhap, can forget I wear a hump.
[*Rising from his knees and hiding the aglet again.*]
And Midge, O Midge, if she but catch a whim,
To have me in her service, take me hence,
Where I can be among the nobly born,
And serve as knights may serve—O brave and true,
To some liege lady!
[*Pacing restlessly with bent head.*]
I stay on and on,
For just the memory o' my one friend;
And for his sake, I would work out the term,
O' my apprenticeship to his mean sire,
And do my utmost for the poor old dam,

That loved him and gave shelter when he died;
But could I gain the favor o' My Lord,
And that sweet lady, whose great, searching eyes
Haunt me, as I had seen them long ago—
[*He pauses with a far-away look of remembering.*]
Aye, and the red, red, mouth, so tender-sweet,
And all so pitying—'twas *pitying* then,
Somewhere within my memory—
[*He breaks off with a little, passionate gesture.*]
O 'tis a dream,
One o' my many dreams!
[*He sits cross-legged on the ground. Lights have appeared in the windows of the inn and through the open door a long trail of firelight falls upon him there.*]

MIDGE

Mayhap she listened in some noble's hall,
Those days thou used to stroll and pipe and tell
Thy ballads everywhere;—O, Snick-up, tell
The ballad o' the lady and the knight—
'Tis best of all!

SNICK-UP

[*Starting to his feet.*]
Ah, how I see it now—
My dear old Truepenny moves down the hall,
I after him—lights, ladies on all sides—
I shake a shower o' bird-notes—
[*He utters a brief warbling.*]
laughter, cries
And clapping o' white hands; then he steps forth—
No sound now any more but just his voice:
[*Now in shadow and now in the trail of light, he recites;* MIDGE *leans forward, following his every motion.*]
Her gown was green as blades o' grass,
And silver was her snood;
Now never any comelier lass,
In hall or castle stood.

"O come ye up," the Earl cried loud,
"And sit ye by my side!"
"I'd liefer wrap me in my shroud,
Than be an old man's bride!"

They put her in a tower high,
With many a guard around;

"O I would liefer far to die
And lay me in the ground!

"O I would liefer die this night,
Than wed the Earl so old;
His eye is dim; his beard is white;
His withered hand is cold!"

Now, what is that, beyond the wall,
And surging in the gate?
'Tis spears a-shining thick and tall,
That will not rest nor wait!

O what is it that waves so white,
Above the highest head?
O 'tis the plume o' bravest knight,
That ere to foray led!

The tower-doors, they break like shell—
O strong the knight and bold!
Now weep no more, my bonnie Bell,
Thou shalt wed no earl so old!

A-down the tower stair they leapt,
And through the hall they fled;
Across a corpse she lightly stept,—
It was the old earl dead!

They get to horse and swift they ride,
And glad and glad is she,
To be his lovesome, gay, young bride
Within his far countrie!

MIDGE

[*Clapping her hands.*]
Ah, but 'twas grand!

SNICK-UP

[*Bowing to left and right.*]
And so—he bows him off—
I catch the coin in cap and then away,
Away from throngs I ever hated so,
Away from catch-penny tricks—out once again
Into the greenwood! there to roam and sleep,
My good, good friend and all the strolling crew;—
How he did pity me the night she died,
And after, when my kinsfolk spurned me forth!

MIDGE

Why did they spurn thee, Snick-up?

SNICK-UP

[*Uneasily.*]

O a hump
Is nowhere welcome—dear old Truepenny knew—
And so he gave the smock o' dreams to me
The day he strolled away to Heaven;—he knew
A dream's the only thing to hide a hump,
And—any other ills o' life!
The smock, he said, a great magician wove
And cast a spell on; now whoever wears,
Unto this day can call up what he will,
To feed his fancy on.

MIDGE

O take it out,
And let us dream again about the knight,
And all the other wonders thou hast seen!

[SNICK-UP, *lying on his stomach, reaches under the bench into a hidden recess among the roots of the tree.*]

SNICK-UP

So here ye are, my good, old smock o' dreams!

[*He draws forth a tattered garment of deep orange color and shakes it out as he seats himself beside* MIDGE.]

MIDGE

[*Stroking it.*]
Good smock o' dreams!

SNICK-UP

Come under Minikin!
[*He wraps the smock around her shoulders and his own.*
The light touches the rich color of it as the boy and girl lean against the dark trunk of the tree. A crescent moon has risen over the pines. SNICK-UP *speaks dreamily.*]
I see thee as a lady in a bower,
And thou art fairer than the fairest rose
That hangs along the trellis overhead;
Thy shoon are silver, and thy shining hair
Curls like the tendrils of a running vine
And falls in golden shower, down to the ground;

Three aglets hang upon thy breast, more bright
Than all the rays of this here in the moon—
[*He holds My Lady's jewel forth to the light.*]
Thy hands are white as milk—

MIDGE

With ne'er a wart?

SNICK-UP

Thy hands are silken smooth and twine sweet flowers,
For Maytime festival—

MIDGE

And wear I rings?

SNICK-UP

Upon thy finger gleams a strange, green stone,
Slips like a lizard's back, so—in and out,
Among the gillyvors.
[*He weaves, with the aglet glancing in one hand.*]
Thy favorite bird

Preens on thy shoulder, flitters purple wing,
Spreads breast o' flame and coos thee softly so—
[*He whistles a very low, tender bird-note.*]

MIDGE

O good, *good* Smock o' Dreams, now more and more!

SNICK-UP

A page bears in to thee a sparkling dish,
Heaped high with sweet meats.

MIDGE

And with sillibubs?

SNICK-UP

[*Casting his share of the smock around her and springing up.*]
Nay, Midge, an' thou wouldst have a hand in this,
Dream as I tell thee and make *me* show forth!
Say now, *I see thee standing straight and tall—*

MIDGE

O now I see thee standing straight and tall—

SNICK-UP

And shining bright thou art, from brow to feet—

MIDGE

And shining bright thou art, from brow to feet—

SNICK-UP

The King, the very highest, leads thee on—

MIDGE

The King, the very highest, leads thee on—
[MISTRESS LOCKET'S *voice sounds from within.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

Midge—marry, where art thou?—Midge! Midge!
[*She rises quickly, throwing aside the smock.*]

SNICK-UP

From the good Smock o' Dreams, now, little friend,
I'll wake a hundred nightingales for thee

To fall asleep by and to keep a-dreaming!
Where shall they sing from?—choose ye now
their home!

MIDGE

[*Looking about; then pointing to a tree outside the wall, by the gate.*]
O make their voices come from there—'tis tallest!

SNICK-UP

Nay, 'tis an elder—never bird sings there,
Since Judas hanged him on an elder-tree!

MIDGE

[*In awed voice.*]
The priest says Judas was the worst o' wights!

SNICK-UP

Hanging's the worst o' deaths—the very worst.

MIDGE

Then from this linden tree?

SNICK-UP

Aye, 'tis our friend—
Most loving of all trees—each leaf a heart!
[MISTRESS LOCKET *peers from the inn door.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

Midge!

MIDGE

[*Running toward her.*]
Here I am!

MISTRESS LOCKET

By saints, 'tis time!

[*Both go in, closing the doors after them.* SNICK-UP *seats himself again and wraps his tattered legacy about him; leaning his head back against the trunk of the tree, he sends forth gush upon gush of wild, fluting melody. The lights go out at the windows; in the darkness and melody, the scene shifts and it is morning in the garden-close.*]

Scene II

The garden-close is bounded on right and left by a high wall, beyond which blossomy tree-tops are misting. At rear, a side view of the inn shows an entrance and steps, from which the broad central path leads down, bordered by gay flower-beds; from the right of this path, near the inn, a short walk ends at a gate in the wall; another walk, farther down, leads to a small arbor, thickly hung with grape-vines. From the left of the main path, still another narrow walk leads, between low hedges of yew to a wicket. On this side of the garden (down) a rustic seat lounges near an old fountain, overgrown with mosses and playing a slender, trickling stream. The water softly plashes.

Mistress Locket *hobbles from the inn and down the main path, followed by* Constance, *who carries bright, silken cushions.*

MISTRESS LOCKET

This way we'll find a nook will please right
well
My Lady's whimsy now, I warrant ye!
Posies and sunlight—quiet as a shrine!

CONSTANCE

Sooth, 'tis the very spot!
[*She arranges cushions on the rustic seat
and for her lady's feet.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Lending a hand.*]
So—smooth and soft,
And she so near her time!

CONSTANCE

Aye, near her time,
And O, I cannot rout the shadowy dread,
That flitters like a bat's wing o'er my path,
Now here, now there! Good Father Michael's
word
Weighs not a feather, cozen how he may,
With bits o' flattery and soft *Pooh, pooh!*
And *Nurses' tale* and *Misrule turns thy head;*

An omen is an omen for all that—
Mauger a thousand priests!
[*She shakes and punches the pillows vigorously.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

Aye, omens hold!
Many's the one hath come out true for me.

CONSTANCE

Yule-omen surer is than all the rest!
Mark ye, Dame Locket:
[*She draws her down beside her on the seat.*]
'Twas last Christmas eve,
I read strange fate for first-born o' that house!
This very day, at dawn, a swallow flew
Straight through the casement, lighting near her bed—
There's grief in that for some one close to her—
I dare not think on't!

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Nudging her coaxingly.*]
Odds pittikins, my child!
These omens sometimes fail, or oftener we—

We fail to read 'em right—all's well, all's well!
Slept she in comfort through the night?

CONSTANCE

Oh, aye!
Such nightingales to lull her off to sleep—
'Twas gush on gush o' sweetness loosed from Heaven!

MISTRESS LOCKET

Nay, 'twas the hunchback, Snick-up! Him my son
Brought here a year agone—ye mind my tale?
He whistles like the birds.

CONSTANCE

[*Incredulous.*]
Nay, it was birds!

MISTRESS LOCKET

Nay, it was Snick-up hath a gift like that!

CONSTANCE

[*Excitedly.*]
Thou sayest he is a hunchback? By all saints,
My Lady must not catch a sight of him—

She ne'er could bide them!—in her present
state,
'Twould harm her sure—

MISTRESS LOCKET

Nay, Mistress, thou art scared
Of all things under Heaven, now, with thy
signs!
But, have no fear—each lad about the place
And every wench must off to Morris dance
Around the May-pole; Locket's mad enow,—
The sweating sickness is no worse to him,
Than granting two hours' frolic in the year.

CONSTANCE

[*With a happy start.*]
Aye, so 'tis May Day—I had clean forgot!

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Rising.*]
So—fetch My Lady to the pleasaunce here,
And make ye merry with her and forget
All but the happy signs.

[*She hobbles back toward the inn,* CONSTANCE *following and gathering a posy by the way.*]

CONSTANCE

These flowers I'll twine
Into a basket for her!

MISTRESS LOCKET

Good, aye, good!

CONSTANCE

Some lady-smocks to match her own pale blush!

MISTRESS LOCKET

And cuckoo flowers!

CONSTANCE

Lent lilies—like her hair!

MISTRESS LOCKET

The marigolds will give her time o' day!

CONSTANCE

And lavender, my love!

[*They go in.*

MIDGE, GAFFA *and* HAL *come running, hand-in-hand, by path at left.* HAL *is*

first, in the garb of Robin Hood; next, MIDGE *as Maid Marian; then* GAFFA *as Friar Tuck. Other lads and maids rush by them and through the gate (at right) where* SNICK-UP *has just entered. He stands aside and they call to him in passing.*]

ONE

Come on!

ANOTHER

Ye'll miss it!

ANOTHER

The May-pole's high as Heaven!

[SNICK-UP *has strolled to the main path and* MIDGE, GAFFA *and* HAL *encircle him; with hands clasped, they dance around, then break the ring.*]

MIDGE

[*Curtseying.*]
Maid Marian, please ye!

[SNICK-UP *sweeps a low bow with his old turkey-plumed hat.*]

SNICK-UP

Good den to ye, fair Mistress!

HAL

[*Ducking and pulling his forelock.*]
Robin Hood!

SNICK-UP

[*Knocking* ROBIN'S *cap off.*]
Caps off to gentry, or I'll have ye jailed!
[HAL *reaches for his hat and the worthy friar plays leap-frog over his back;* HAL *rises and lands the friar a good-natured blow which the friar is about to return lustily, when* SNICK-UP *pulls him off by the cowl.*]
Pax vobiscum and go tell thy beads!
Thou scurvy friar!
[HAL *rushes to the gate and* GAFFA *after him.*]

HAL

The Morris!

GAFFA

Hurry!

MIDGE

[*Loitering by* SNICK-UP.]

Come,
And dance around the pole!—

SNICK-UP

[*Bitterly.*]

I dance?—O fine!
And be the ass that drags the car along,
While wags and wenches hoot at me—O *fine!*

MIDGE

[*Wistfully.*]

Nay, that they would not! there will be much fun!

SNICK-UP

Have I not told thee of a better way,
That I shall pass the morning, silly Midge?
[*He picks a cowslip and sticks it in her hair, chucking her under the chin.*]
So—Queen o' the May!

MIDGE

[*Wonderingly.*]
And wilt thou dare it—true?

SNICK-UP

Aye, that I will! My Lady comes here soon—
See! there she will sit.
[*He points to the rustic seat.*]
And I wait yonder—*there*—
Hid i' the vines—
[*He points to the arbor.*]
The rest will follow soon!
A Morris dance?—to the devil!
[*Snaps his fingers.*]
Not for me!—
I've other feats to dare!—*Sh!* haste thee, Midge,
My Lord and Lady come—
[MIDGE *runs off through the gate.*]
So here I go!

[*He glides into hiding among the grape-vines as* LORD *and* LADY FAUKNER *move down the main path to the rustic seat. She wears a long, sweeping robe, which envelops her form; on her head is a little*

lace cap. She bends here and there to smell of a blossom on the taller shrubs.]

LADY FAUKNER

How sweet the world is, Edward! And so near
My childhood's home!

FAUKNER

[*Placing his arm about her.*]
But one day's journey more,
And wish comes true; thy little feet may walk
Through all their girlhood ways; thy presence reach,
Like sunlight, into every ivied wall;
And all the insect world in hiding there,
Will then burst forth and fly or creep or whirr,
Feeling new life in warmth and shine of thee!
[*He leads her to the seat and places cushions at her feet.*]
Now, rest thee here, my life, and keep thee fresh,
To fare forth on the morrow!
[*He sits beside her.* SNICK-UP'S *face peers through the vines.*]

LADY FAUKNER

Ah, dear Love!
How all the blossoming daintiness around
Sets me to dreaming of wee, folded palms
All rosy-fine; and smallest, pearly feet,
Mottled with pink, where kisses warm have crushed,
Like browsing bees, upon their loveliness;
And every little bright-winged butterfly,
Twinkling his way above these blooming paths,
Doth seem th' elusive smile, that soon will flit
Across a little, slumbering, upturned face—
Flower o' both our lives, upon my breast!

FAUKNER

[*With intense feeling.*]
Flower o' both our lives—the very flower!

LADY FAUKNER

[*Turning to look earnestly at him.*]
But, ah, how solemn thou dost echo it!
How grave thou art of late!—so restless, too—
I have a growing presage of some care
That haunts thy step—

FAUKNER

[*Hastily.*]

Nay, Love, we thoughtful grow,
Fronting such blessedness!

LADY FAUKNER

In truth, we must!
Why 'tis a consecration unto all,
This giving an immortal soul a life;
Oh, to endow with life—think, think, my Love!
And having so endowed, what sacred charge
To guard that life forever with our own.

[SNICK-UP *parts the vines and reaches a little from the arbor.*]

And, O my Husband, canst thou understand,
How in the world are children of mere chance—
Unwelcome—nay, uncared-for—

FAUKNER

[*Bowing his face upon his hands.*]

O my heart!

[SNICK-UP, *in his intentness, has stepped quite away from the arbor and leans, listening, listening.*]

LADY FAUKNER

When I behold what hopes we foster here,
The lavish welcome and the tender scope
Of all our plans, the future pride and pledge—

FAUKNER

[*With bent head and hands clenched before him.*]

Then think upon that other nameless one,
The child, thou sayest, of chance—all life a taunt,
Lashing him back upon a hopeless shame!

[*There is the pent-up yearning and misery of years in the young, listening face.*]

LADY FAUKNER

[*Drawing her lord back by the shoulder.*]

Nay, we'll not think upon it any more!
That brooding look upon thy brow comes back,
At mention of such sadness.

[*Here the boy turns and, brushing his sleeve across his eyes, steps noiselessly back to the arbor.*]

Dost thou know
'Tis May Day? And here's one would dearly love

To have a gallant crown her for his queen,
And bend the knee in homage—aye, and pay
Some tribute unto beauty—if 'tis here?
[*Looking at him archly.*]

FAUKNER

[*Taking her face in his hands with unspeakable tenderness.*]
Here in the tender oval of thy face,
Here have I found the springtime of my life,
The blossoming of my soul!
[*He slips to his knees, kissing her hands reverently.*]

LADY FAUKNER

[*Passionately.*]
Nay, nay, my lips!
[*She lifts his face and bending, kisses him upon the mouth.*]
So thou dost crown me royal with thy love!
Thine every word a deathless flower to wreathe
My proudest wifehood! Ah, but when our son—

FAUKNER

[*Starting.*]

Our *son!*

[*Then, to hide his start, he rises and sits beside her.*]

LADY FAUKNER

[*Drooping her head away from him with happy shyness and fingering her laces.*]

The *first-born* aye should be a son!

[LORD FAUKNER *springs to his feet.*

SNICK-UP, *who has been peering from the arbor, his wistful face gleaming white against the dark leafage, now draws quickly back into hiding, just as* LOCKET *enters by the gate.*]

FAUKNER

[*Pacing.*]

In very truth, a son!

LADY FAUKNER

Now, there's the frown,
The restlessness—thou fearest some mishap!

LOCKET

[*Approaching a little way down the main path.*]
My Lord, the falcons are in readiness,
If't please Your Worship!

LADY FAUKNER

Aye, go take thy sport,
And bring me back a happy, careless brow!

FAUKNER

[*Kissing her hand.*]
I will send Constance to attend thee here.

LADY FAUKNER

[*Calling after him as he moves down the main path, preceded by* LOCKET.]
And bid her bring my favorite book o' ballads.
[*To herself, sighing.*]
Mayhap 'twill move the dial swifter round!
[SNICK-UP *watches them, parting the vines. As* FAUKNER *disappears through the inn door and* LOCKET *through the gate, he steps cautiously out; glancing around, he*

draws the aglet forth and flashes it up in the sun. Then, he moves forward a little and across. As he does so, LADY FAUKNER *starts violently and half rises. Seeing what it is, she utters a piercing scream, just as he goes down upon one knee, holding out the aglet.*]

SNICK-UP

My Lady, here!

[*She turns from him, covering her face with her hands; and uttering another scream, falls back upon the seat in a dead faint.* SNICK-UP *rises in dazed horror, speaking low.*]

O God! That look! Help, help!

[*He dashes up the main path as* LOCKET *and a falconer rush through gate at right. At the turn of the path leading to the gate,* SNICK-UP *trips and falls;* LOCKET *and the other men spring on him just as* FAUKNER *and* CONSTANCE *hurry from the inn and* MISTRESS LOCKET *hobbles through the wicket.*]

LOCKET

Ha, ye devil!

FAUKNER

My God! what hath he done?

LOCKET

Thief! see the jewel he hath snatched!
[*He holds out the aglet.*]

CONSTANCE

[*Taking it.*]
'Tis hers!
The aglet—look, My Lord!

FAUKNER

[*Hurrying down.*]
Heed naught but her!

MISTRESS LOCKET

What means it, Snick-up?

LOCKET

Why, it means but this,
We bear our singing-bird here to his cage!

CONSTANCE

[*Falling on her knees beside* LADY FAUKNER.]

The swallow! O My Lady—she is dead!

FAUKNER

Nay, hold thy peace! Locket, a leech, a leech!
Ride—some one, fierce as hell!

LOCKET

[*To falconer.*]

Get ye to horse!

[*As the man runs toward the gate,* SNICK-UP *wrenches free from* LOCKET, *dashes down to* FAUKNER *and kneels.*]

LOCKET

Stop, murderer!

SNICK-UP

[*To his lordship.*]

Hear me—in mercy—hear!

[LOCKET *grips him with one hand and smites him across the mouth.*]

FAUKNER

That such a one was ever born as thou!

Curtain

ACT III

Scene I

Two weeks are supposed to have elapsed since Act II.

A cell in an old prison about a mile from the inn; a long shaft of afternoon light falls through the bars of a high opening in the stone walls (at right), and shines upon Snick-up *as he lies on a pallet of straw; a low wooden bench stands at left; a door at rear.* Snick-up *raises himself on one elbow and gazes toward the light.*

SNICK-UP

O light, O light, I have so dearly loved!
Golden and warm to bask in by the road;
Shimmering fine to dream by 'neath a bough;
Beckoning bright to follow—follow far,
Over tumbling, restless, reaching sea!
When by the dawn tomorrow, thou dost glint
Each hill-top, spire and gaping, lifted face—

As my poor hulk hangs black against the rose—
What pathway wilt thou lead my stroller soul?
[*A sound of grating bolts; the door at rear opens inward, disclosing a flight of stone steps; a turnkey draws the door to behind* MISTRESS LOCKET, *who enters, leaning heavily on her staff.* SNICK-UP *springs to his feet.*]

SNICK-UP

Good Dame, to grant my wish and come this day—
The last I am to live!
[*He draws the bench forward for her, near the cot, where he seats himself.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

How could I else?
And many other days would I have come,
To tell thee how I trust thee and believe
All Midge's tale, she told them at the last—
[*She weeps, bending her head upon her staff.*]

SNICK-UP

[*Laying a hand on her shoulder.*]
So good old Truepenny's mother stands my friend,
Counting me guiltless of so foul a shame,
I die the easier!

MISTRESS LOCKET

Thy friend indeed!
But closest watch they have kept over thee,
Fearing o' witchcraft—which they charged thee with,
The day o' thy trial—when old Locket stood,
Tickling their ears with tales o' devil's pipe,
Kept in thy throat; and of some charm thou hadst,
Hidden away to conjure with, forsooth!
Since they have made Hal's brother turnkey now,
All's well.

SNICK-UP

He is our friend with human heart!
He will let Midge in, too—is she without?

MISTRESS LOCKET

Aye, she is waiting with no fear o' thee—
Witchcraft forsooth—O wretched, hellish work!
I know my blessed son would ne'er seek out
A limb o' sorcery for his trusty friend,
Beg me to harbor old Beelzebub,
When he lay dying in his mother's arms!
Nay, something noble in thy mien I saw,
Despite thy shape;—thine eyes, thy brow, thy hands—
[*She takes them tenderly in her own.*]
Thy hands were never meant for such rough work;
Thine eyes have looked on something we see not;
Thy brow—thy brow—
[*She lifts his hair gently and looks searchingly in his face.*]
Nay, 'tis bewildering—
There is a look o' gentry—like My Lord—

SNICK-UP

Nay, tell me of My Lady! Turnkey saith,
She bore a child before her time—Ah, God!
[*He springs up, pacing back and forth.*]

Lay close to death because of me—of me,
Who would not harm a rose beside her door;
A something in her sunbright hair—her face—
Haunts me from out my childhood; on the night
My mother died, I saw such hair, such eyes,
Raised full of wonder and of something high—
Never to be forgot; to see it change,
Grow wild with horror—O that look, that look,
Because of me—the curse of that one look!

MISTRESS LOCKET

Nay, dwell no more on't, lad! She is not harmed;
This very morn she rallied from her spell
Of torpor and of weakness—breathed some words—
'Tis sure now she will live; the babe thrives, too,—
A little daughter; Mistress Constance saith,
My Lady held the first-born of a house
Should ever be a son; mayhap they claim
Thou hadst a hand in that, with witch's trick—
Curse their injustice!

SNICK-UP

Nay, the case looked bad:
Caught with the booty in my very hand,
Seized from the person,—ah, no larceny that,
But *robbery*—from highest gentry, too,
And jewel of rare price—an heirloom dear—

MISTRESS LOCKET

Their tale o' witchcraft, years o' vagrancy,
The attack thou madest upon thy master's throat;
Then, O the worst o' this tight snarl o' chance!—
Mayhap the death—not o' the one, but *two,*
If all had come about as My Lord feared,
With both the wife and child! No judge alive
But would say *hang* to such a tale as this!

SNICK-UP

Add to it *bastard* and a hunch on back,
Just Midge's word—my friend, a scullery wench—
Did not thy Locket hint at leman there?—
What heed would justice pay to such as that?—

A cricket chirping to a gale o' wind!
So in good faith 'tis *Snick-up*—aye, *go hang!*
The rogue was prophet who first called me so.

MISTRESS LOCKET

Was ever such a dull o' pate as Midge?—
Holding back all until the very end,
Because she had promised thee to speak no word!
Such laggard story was trumped-up, forsooth,
All must 'a' thought!

SNICK-UP

Nay, now, she did her best!
But my day flies, good Dame, and I've a wish,
'Twill ease my heart if thou wilt grant.
[*He seats himself beside her again.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

What wish
Could I withhold? thou poor, forsaken one!

SNICK-UP

Thou dost remember, when thy dear son died,
He gave me a joint-ring, which my mother left?

MISTRESS LOCKET

I do remember, aye!

SNICK-UP

'Twas to be kept
In trust for me, till I was grown—thou mindest?
By certain kinsfolk, if they harbored me—

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*With scorn.*]
Which never did they—Pah, the shameless crew!

SNICK-UP

And so he kept it and the twisted imp
That all despised—God rest his knightly soul!

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Wistfully.*]
Perchance thou'lt see him soon?

SNICK-UP

Perchance—and *her!*
I have no fear to take the dark, short road,

Down which he strolled and where she too hath passed.

[*From under his jerkin he draws a joint-ring, hanging on a chain.*]

She told thy Truepenny, it bore his name,
Who gave me never any name at all,
But *bastard*—gave me just my life and that!
Edward—she called me so, but when I learned
How he had shamed us both, in bitterness
I held to biting nickname of a wag;
And strolling ever on to other parts,
My Christian name sloughed off.

MISTRESS LOCKET

A noble name—
'Tis that Lord Faukner bears.

SNICK-UP

Humble, in sooth,
My mother's title!

[*He slips the chain from his own neck and hangs it about* MISTRESS LOCKET.]

Take it, I do beseech,—
Now that I go to pay the penalty,
Of my deep wrong to her—and ask that she,
The tender lady of the garden-close,

Will keep it, with my sorrow and my love,
For all the anguish of that bitter hour!

MISTRESS LOCKET

By His very wounds, I will!

[*She conceals the ring in her dress and slips to her knees, praying. Then he bends over her.*]

SNICK-UP

And now, good-bye!

[*He helps her to her feet.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

[*Brokenly.*]

Bear him my love!

SNICK-UP

The love of all thy heart!

[*He leads her to the door. There he kneels, kissing her hand reverently. She bends, sobbing, and touches his hair with her lips. He rises, holds open the door for her and she mounts the old steps as* MIDGE *comes hurriedly down and enters.*]

Ah, little Midge, the sight o' thee is good!

[MIDGE *crosses quickly by him and, throwing herself across the cot, sobs passionately.* SNICK-UP *goes over to her and, taking her by the shoulder with a gentle shake, draws her to a sitting posture.*]

Nay, nay, now, Midge! I'll call the turnkey,
straight;
Have thee put out. I'll not be drowned in
tears!
E'en hanging is better!

MIDGE

[*Vehemently.*]
Nay, 'tis worst of all—
Thou saidst so thine own self—a Judas' death!
'Twas when I found they sentenced thee to
hang,
I told them all ye told me, by the tree!
A broken vow is damned—What have I done?
O 'twas to save thy life—

SNICK-UP

[*Soothingly, sitting beside her.*]
Aye, Midge, dear Midge!

MIDGE

[*Still excitedly.*]

I told them but the truth—how thou didst plan
To give the aglet back which thou hadst found—
Aye, *found*—not *stole!* But O their flinty faces,
Staring hard, believing not a word!
And Locket's voice, grating his lie on lie!

SNICK-UP

[*Bitterly.*]

That still was truth—some little squeak o' truth,
Under the grinding, crushing, killing lies!

MIDGE

I always feared him for his hate o' thee!
And now all hate thee for a very witch—
All—*All's* against thee!

[*She falls sobbing again.*]

SNICK-UP

And I must go hang—
Unless thou help me to another fate.

MIDGE

[*Lifting her head and staring hard.*]
I help? Another fate? What meanest thou?

SNICK-UP

Ah, Midge, to-morrow, an' thou help me not,
Upon that ugly arm, a-reaching out
Its horrid shadow over yonder square,
I shall—

MIDGE

[*Covering her eyes.*]
In God's name, hold!

SNICK-UP

[*Passionately.*]
The gaping crowd—
How I did ever loathe a gaping crowd!—
How often have I seen the leer, the grin,
The stupid wonder and the brutish stare!
At dawn how it will stare and gape and grin
Its last upon me, as I mount—

MIDGE

Forbear!
In mercy, hold—I *cannot* live it o'er!

SNICK-UP

How I should love to cheat old Gibbet there,
And all the gaping crowd!—play one more trick,
As I have played so many, to outwit
Their loutish, cruel gibes! Silence the quip—
Snick-up, ecod, it is go hang, go hang!
That bitter jest would never leave their throats
An' ye would serve me true!

MIDGE

Aye, tell me how!

SNICK-UP

[*Tensely, rapidly.*]
Well, then, thou knowest of that wooded place,
We have called *Little Hell,* it so doth teem
With deadly nightshade!—think thou, dearest Midge,
How those black drupes would serve me at this hour!
Here might I sit alone and, all in peace,
Eat of that frugal supper, lay me down,
And never waken, when they come to call,
And lead me forth into the glare o' shame—
The ribaldry o' Locket and his kind!

This form, with all its dreary, grim mischance,
Would never come within old Gibbet's reach,
But all unsuffering and still 'twould lie,
The while I strayed far hence and safe at last!

MIDGE

The berries—ye would *eat* them? They are death!

SNICK-UP

O simple child,—thou knowest I *must* die!

MIDGE

But by my hand!

SNICK-UP

Aye, not old Gibbet's arm!

MIDGE

[*Desperately.*]
Nay, nay, I cannot!

SNICK-UP

[*Sinking back upon the seat.*]
Well, then, be it so—
The crowd shall have their sport! I fear not death—

It is not death I mind, but O to pass
Another way than by such utter shame!
[*He buries his head in his hands.*]

MIDGE

O wretched world—when thou hast done no wrong!

SNICK-UP

Nay, such as I had never right to be—
'Tis time I should pack hence, whatever way!

MIDGE

Thou'rt sure about the nightshade—'tis thy wish?

SNICK-UP

[*Alive once more with a flame of eagerness.*]
Who would not choose it so? If thou art friend,
Thou, too, must choose it for me!—*Art* thou friend?

MIDGE

Thou knowest well my love!

SNICK-UP

[*Springing up.*]
Then thou wilt haste,
Gather a heap o' nightshade, bind it fast
Under thy petticoat, fly here again,
Tell Turnkey thou hast minded one last word—
A bit o' comfort for a passing soul—
Then shall I bless thee and shall go in peace!

MIDGE

[*Weeping softly.*]
Then as thou wilt!

SNICK-UP

[*Bending over her tenderly.*]
My ever faithful Midge!
Keep thou the smock o' dreams,—my only thanks,—
Wrap it around thee close, and dream and dream
The many things I showed thee 'neath the stars!
But O, in God's name, haste!

MIDGE

[*Rising.*]
I will, I will!
It shall be all thy wish—aye, to the last!

SNICK-UP

[*Going before and opening the door.*]
Then haste, O haste!

[MIDGE *goes out. The door is closed and the bolt is heard grinding back to place.* SNICK-UP *crosses with the bench, and placing it under the opening, mounts and gazes out through the grating.*]

Here will I watch and wait,
Until the nightshade come to weave my shroud.

[*He whistles a clear, simple little air of piercing sweetness.*]

Curtain

Scene II

The courtyard of the Inn two hours later; the sky shows red above the pines; Misrule *lolls sleek limbs and silken foppery on the bench under the linden; he twangs a lute and sings languidly.*

MISRULE

Ah, well-a-way!
There is no day,
For my mistress comes not hither;
Bloom on the vine of my song falls a-wither—
She comes not hither, not hither!
[*Enter* Locket *shuffling out of the inn.*]

MISRULE

[*Breaking off with a yawn.*]
Good Master Locket, is the whole world dead?

LOCKET

Nay, 'tis not dead—the whole world—but clean daft!

Beshrew me now, a-gadding it must go,
To see a limb o' Satan in his cell,
Whatever hap;—the evil eye to 'em all!
I'll to my business—dangle an' who may!
[*He goes round at left in direction of the stables.*]

MISRULE

[*Aside.*]
Aye, lose no grain from out thy maw, old hawk!
[*Lazily humming again.*]
Bloom on the vine o' my song falls a-wither—
She comes——
Ah, hither!
[*Starting forward as he sees* CONSTANCE *appear in the balcony, much excited. She leans over the rail and speaks down to him breathlessly.*]

CONSTANCE

O prithee, hush thy love-lorn luting now!
[MISRULE *with a flourish twirls his lute up into the linden and crosses, all attention.*]
Hast seen My Lord or Father Michael—say—

There's matter o' grave import stirring here—
Hast seen them—say!
[*With a little stamp.*]

MISRULE

[*Jumping.*]
The Reverend Father struts
In closest converse with a blackbird friar,
Yonder upon the shore.
[*Nodding his head toward the gates.*]
Methinks, the Pope
Hath just been poisoned now, so grave they look.

CONSTANCE

[*With a wave of impatience.*]
Hast seen My Lord, My Lord?

MISRULE

In the garden-close
He ponders, like a sage, upon some book
And—

CONSTANCE

Seek him out at once and beg him come
To the inn, where I may speak with him anon—
I can leave my lady but a space—Run! Fly!

MISRULE

Thy flower would witch forth wings upon my feet.

[CONSTANCE *flings a red rose from her dress and he, catching it, dashes around the corner of the inn.* CONSTANCE *disappears just as* FATHER MICHAEL *and a friar enter through the gates and come down talking earnestly.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

He would not be confessed?

THE FRIAR

In vain I have tried
To gain a word there with him in his cell,
But proof is certain as I did explain—
'Tis he beyond a doubt.

FATHER MICHAEL

[*With a look of profound sorrow.*]
Beyond a doubt!

[*He paces up and down in deepest thought; the friar goes to the gates and looks out toward the sea.* LORD FAUKNER *comes*

hurriedly around the house at left, followed by MISRULE *as* CONSTANCE *appears at the door.*]

CONSTANCE

[*Approaching* FAUKNER *and the priest as they stand near the tree, and talking very rapidly.* MISRULE *perches on back of settle by the door.*]

A word, My Lord,—O 'tis a sorry coil!
My Lady hath grown stronger all the while,
And but an hour ago fell into talk—
Would ask me questions o' the misshaped lad,
Who scared her so, within the garden-close;
And then she said—why, all the poor wench told,
How that he was no thief, but held her out
Something—she saw not what—and fell on knee;
But hunch upon his back—his sudden leap—
Out o' the earth, it seemed, so frighted her—
Thou dost recall how Midge, the little maid,
Sobbed out in court that he had found the stone,
Between the flags, and planned to give it her?
And now My Lady minds the day we came,

I loosed her cloak and heard a little sound,
Thought something dropped—she saith it was
the stone,
And begs me tell thee how the lad was
wronged,
And must be saved.

[*The priest stands looking with strange earnestness at My Lord; the friar paces with bent head by the gate.*]

FAUKNER

[*Laying one hand on her shoulder.*]
Go thou to her and say,
All shall be done that lieth in my power,—
Calm her, in Heaven's name!

[CONSTANCE *goes in.* FAUKNER *turns to the priest.*]

FAUKNER

What change is wrought!
My Lady vindicates the lad—aye, clean;
His case is desperate; witchcraft, as thou
know'st,
Is worst of all these days and, at the court,
The Faith fares ill;—but save him, that we
must,
From such injustice!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*With solemn meaning.*]
Deeper cause hast thou—
Deeper than thou dost dream—to save this lad.

FAUKNER

[*Presagefully.*]
How so? What meanest thou?

[*They look deep into each other's eyes; the priest draws near to My Lord and whispers something close to his ear;* FAUKNER *starts as if stabbed.*]

FAUKNER

[*In sharp anguish.*]
Tell me not so!
In common mercy thou wouldst show a beast,
Tell me not so!

FATHER MICHAEL

'Tis told—and 'tis God's truth!

[*Enter* MISTRESS LOCKET *as hastily as she can;* FAUKNER *has staggered to the seat under the tree; she approaches him.*]

MISTRESS LOCKET

My Lord, I come from one who dies at dawn;
He hath entrusted something to my care—
A gift for thy sweet lady that he harmed,
With no intent but what was high and pure;
Thou'lt see My Lady hath it when she is strong?

[*Fumbling in her bosom.*]

He gave it me and bade me beg of her,
To keep it with his love and with his sorrow
For all the shame and anguish of that hour.

[*Handing him the joint-ring on the chain.*]

It was his mother's gift.

FAUKNER

[*Seizing the ring and gazing hard at it.*]

The joint-ring—*Edward*—
O my God, my God!

[*He buries his face in his hands.*

MISTRESS LOCKET *stands at center, peering earnestly over her staff at* LORD FAUKNER *and the priest, under the linden; the friar pauses by the gate;* MISRULE *leans forward from the settle.*]

Quick Curtain

Scene III

The prison-cell once more. The last pale saffron light of day shimmers in through the high grating. Snick-up *sits on the bench (at left); elbows on knees, his head bowed on his hands. He raises his face—it is flushed scarlet with fever; his eyes are brilliant and dilated; his mouth and hands are stained with the juice of berries; he speaks excitedly.*

SNICK-UP

Nay, Truepenny, nay! we'll hence—out to the open!
I tell thee I did ever hate a crowd—
Smirking or gaping 'tis the same sly tale!
I'll tell thee why, now, Truepenny—none but thee!
[*He leans as though whispering to some one beside him.*]
My mother feared the gibbet ere I was born;
They've often hanged a woman for that shame—

Thou know'st of what I speak? Aye, *bastardry—*
An ugly word! She twisted me with fear—
Fear o' the gibbet, mark ye now, while *he—*
Too noble thou to know there can be such—
A man that sires as beasts will sire their young!
A *father?*

[*Fiercely.*]

Nay, I'll smite thee on the mouth—
Thou, even thou, Truepenny, an' thou call him such!

[*He breaks off, rises and takes a few steps.*]

Ah, now, the greensward—bough above my head!

[*Delightedly, he stretches his length upon the stone floor and, leaning on one elbow, gazes up laughingly, as though into the tree-tops.*]

Ah, birdlings, I can match thee—hush thy throats!

[*He flutes one or two snatches; then breaks off, waveringly.*]

Nay, nay, I cannot now—this burning thirst
Wizens my pipe to a cricket-squeak—what then?
Cricket's a blithesome beggar on the road!

Squeak it again, my little fellow—*so!*

[*He whistles two or three notes hoarsely, with comic gayety; then breaks off and looks about him.*]

Of all the little brooklets I have passed,
Running away across the lush green meadows,
Of all the little hidden, cooling rills,
I have heard lisping in their ferny grots,
Broad rivers reaching blue into the blue,
Is there not one to give me comfort now?
Out i' the greenwood—all was friendly there—
Why do I suffer? Water is for all!

[*He sits cross-legged, peering through the dusk.*]

What is it—twinkle, twinkle, yonder there?
There!

[*Pointing.*]

Seest thou, Truepenny? Glittering in and out—
Threading the eye o' darkness with gold thread?
Ha, 'tis a firefly skipping down the dusk!
Methought it was the aglet now—nay, fie!
Speak not of aglets—they be hated things—
Witches, I tell thee, with the evil eye,
Winking a simple lad down, down to his death!

[*He lies again upon his arm; he tosses restlessly.*]

Ah!—Ah!

[*In anguish.*]

Mother o' God, I thirst!

Weep, Truepenny, now, and I will drink thy tears!

Nay, tears are salt! Nay, thine are tears o' blood!—

Now, art thou Christ—shedding such tears as these?

[*Starting to his feet, he begins bowing to right and left.*]

My Ladies, I would pipe to ye, but for thirst!

I'll stroll no more, I tell ye now, no more—

I'm wearied out, and so to bed—to bed!

[*He staggers to the pallet and falls across it; lifting himself with one last effort, he reaches his arms toward the faint patch of light at the window.*]

O light I have so loved—

[*He sinks back murmuring.*]

Light—light!

[*There is now so little light in the place that nothing is seen but the faintest shimmer over the boy's fair hair and face.*

Steps and the grating of a drawn bolt; the

door opens, letting in a flare of torches. FATHER MICHAEL'S *voice is heard.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

[*From the steps.*]

Nay, Turnkey, we'll not need thee—give me the torch!

[*Enter* FATHER MICHAEL, *bearing a torch and lighting the way for* LORD FAUKNER, *who follows, shrouded in a long cloak. Both peer about and* LORD FAUKNER *moves to the cot.*]

FAUKNER

At last I am come, my Edward!

[*Kneels by the cot.*]

Edward, wake!

[*He falls back, turning to the priest. He speaks with fear in his voice.*]

Feel you his hand—Press ear unto his heart!

[*The priest passes by head of the cot and, holding the torch out with one hand on the other side, bends close to the boy's breast;* LORD FAUKNER *strokes his hand and calls desperately.*]

Edward, I do beseech thee—hear me, hear!

FATHER MICHAEL

The heart is still!

[*Straightening.*]

There is a fetid stench
O' nightshade—

[*He peers on the stones, and crosses again to the bench.*]

FAUKNER

[*Pressing his ear close to the boy's heart.*]
Nay, not dead!

FATHER MICHAEL

[*Bending and touching some leaves and berries with his foot.*]

'Tis here and here!

[*He crosses himself and turns aside, burying his face in his cloak with one hand and holding the torch toward the bed.*]

FAUKNER

[*Raising his arms above his head.*]
Ah, God, too late!

[*He falls forward upon the body, wringing his hands.*]

Betrayed ere thou wast born—
Abandoned unto death—*my son, my son!*

[FATHER MICHAEL *approaches and bends over him, touching him gently on the shoulder.*]

FATHER MICHAEL

Nay, for thy lady's sake and for thy babe,
Come hence!—think thou of her—she must not know!

FAUKNER

[*Turning fiercely.*]

Not *know!* Dost thou forget his legacy?
The ring was left for her and shall be given!
Here on his tender, silent heart I swear!
It is God's will. Down, down through silent years,
That ring of broken vows hath circled round,
And binds us both within:—God's ways are strange!

FATHER MICHAEL

Give her the ring—what then? How shall she know?

FAUKNER

Within is graven *Edward* and my arms!
I tell thee 'tis God's will to have it so;—

Who hath forsaken the life he did beget,
Must crucify himself upon that shame,
Ere Fate will be appeased!

FATHER MICHAEL

Then as thou wilt—
But let us hence, My Lord!

FAUKNER

Here through the night,
I watch—beside my son at last, at last!

[*He bows his head over the boy's form.* FATHER MICHAEL *withdraws, casting a last sorrowful look back upon the father and son. He bears the torch with him and utter darkness is in the place and the sound of a man's anguish.*

In the darkness, the scene shifts. It is the court-yard once more, flooded with moonlight. The windows of the inn are dark. All lies hushed in the sweetness of that May night.

MIDGE *steals from the shadow of the gargoyle and, going to the tree, draws forth the old smock o' dreams from its hiding-place. Burying her face in it, she weeps*

bitterly; then, growing quieter, she wraps it about her shoulders and, kneeling in the moonlight, gazes up as though she saw a vision, murmuring softly:]

MIDGE

O now, I see thee standing straight and tall,
And shining bright thou art, from brow to feet;
A king—the very highest—leads thee on—

Curtain

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